



Youth Work Ireland

Youth Work Ireland Submission to the Youth Services Grant Scheme Review



**An Roinn Leanáí, Comhionannais,
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige**
Department of Children, Equality,
Disability, Integration and Youth

Introduction

The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth has committed to reforming the Youth Services Grant Scheme (YSGS).

The YSGS scheme was designed to allocate funding to organisations providing universal services to children and young people. This scheme has been in operation since the early 1980s and currently provides funding to 30 National Youth Organisations.

The ultimate goal of this project is to reform the YSGS in order to deliver a scheme that is more responsive to the current needs of children and young people who may benefit from services delivered by universal youth work organisations.

This overarching goal is supplemented by the goal of making changes to the scheme that enhance the ability of participating organisations to better deliver their key services.

In addition, the reform of the YSGS also aims to improve the governance and oversight of the scheme and to modernise its administration; to ensure greater levels of efficiency and effectiveness with respect to Exchequer funding.

In pursuit of these goals, a proposal outlining the scope of the potential reform of the YSGS was approved by Minister Roderic O’Gorman in July 2021. This proposal included three key components (upon which we would know would like your input):

- Objectives – towards an impactful reform of the YSGS
- Deliverables – tangible outputs as effect of the reform
- Delivery Options – consideration of how best to implement reform

It is important to note that whilst the project proposal was structured around these three elements, it was always anticipated that these three factors could evolve on foot of engagement with stakeholders and further review and assessment of the scheme.

This request for submissions seeks your opinions, concerns and recommendations regarding delivery of the YSGS reform project.

The remainder of this template is divided into four sections:

- Section 1 is structured to align with the project objectives.
- Section 2 seeks your feedback on the proposed deliverables.
- Section 3 relates to proposed methods of project delivery.
- Section 4 gives you the opportunity to provide any comments on the process as a whole.

Section 1: Project Objectives

The project team considers the below to be the primary objectives of this reform:

- Improve accessibility to YSGS, utilising input and insights from children and young people to create conditions for increasing the rates of participation in universal youth services.
- Develop mechanisms that empower funded organisations to actively and agilely respond to demographic and other dynamic factors impacting children and young people
- Institute governance standards that enhance levels of assurance and oversight with respect to Exchequer funding
- Ensure the grant funding process is rooted in evidence, addresses needs and provides value for money
- Provide for transparent access to the reformed YSGS, thereby facilitating the evolution of the YSGS to better reflect the contemporary universal youth services environment

The Reform Project Plan outlines a number of key objectives. Please give your feedback regarding this priority.

(500 Words Max)

The original aim of the Youth Service Grant as stated in the Project Plan as “allocating resources to universal youth organisations” does not seem to be based on the documentation and correspondence down through the years and the 1986 “rules” (attached), they summarise the scheme as follows;

“Funding for the support of voluntary youth work is made available on an annual basis to national and major regional voluntary youth organisations through the Youth Service Grant Scheme. The continued funding of voluntary youth organisations through the Scheme is intended to ensure the emergence, promotion, growth and development of youth organisations with distinctive philosophies and programmes aimed at the social education of young people. The work of these organisations is based on the following philosophy:

1. it is educational in design and objective
2. it is concerned with the personal, social, recreational, cultural and spiritual development of young people
3. it rests upon the concept and practice of voluntary adult involvement with and for young people
4. it promotes the concept and practice of youth participation in the programme and life of the organisation itself, local communities and society in general
5. it promotes co-operation among youth and youth work organisations
6. it seeks to respond to the real needs of youth.”

We are still not clear on the “project proposal” or “project plan” i.e., whether there is a consolidated document and if that is available. This would seem important to assist organisations input and for proper transparency.

We are still concerned about a rather rigid separation between targeted and universal in this process and more generally in the approach of the Department. This seems to have evolved in Departmental thinking but is less apparent in the relevant policy documents.

On the ground, the communities where young people live are more complex and diverse than “targeted and universal”. We want young people from different backgrounds to mix, socialise and be friends. An emphasis on these differing needs is useful, but we can often be in danger of allowing the administrative rules damage the necessary recognition of this on the ground. Professional judgment and flexibility for funded organisations needs be maintained as well. Allowing for the above, the objectives are as expected for any funded work. Youth is a period of transition and development, and all young people will need supports at some time during this, some young people will be in need of more supports than others. We must be careful about being overly prescriptive and there has been significant

research on this in the formal educational settings. Nationally as an intermediary body we use a federal model to deliver most effectively in local communities and our research shows this approach has much to recommend it.

[https://www.youthworkireland.ie/images/uploads/general/YWI_full_report_final_\(intergrated_youth_services\).pdf](https://www.youthworkireland.ie/images/uploads/general/YWI_full_report_final_(intergrated_youth_services).pdf)

The reform process should be firmly based on the published policies such as Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures and the National Youth Strategy and indeed the Youth Work Act 2001. The objectives refer to “Universal Youth Organisations”, this seems to be a new term once more not based on any relevant policy. The 1986 rules still offer much value here. The policy context should be the starting point rather than audits or technical considerations, important as they are. The relevant policy documents are adopted through the proper policy making process and signify the evolution of policy that has created the picture today from the 1986 rules, through to the Youth Work Act on to the National Youth Work Development Plan to the current documents.

The objectives also appear to be rather administrative and technical rather than based on the lived experience of those providing services. Input from children and young people would of course be welcome and this is a constant in the work of anyone delivering on the YSG. If there are issues relating to “governance standards” “evidence” “value for money” and other issues like this, it might be useful to name them and have these discussions. In our work we certainly believe there is no shortage of auditing, checking, gathering of statistics, and dealing with visits and inspections so there needs to be more clarity as to what precisely the issues are here and if they need to be so dominant in this review.

In short, it is important to separate out the overall macro policy objectives from more technical and administrative matters. In essence there needs to be an agreed vision for what the YSG does, and this should be firmly based on agreed policy.

The relevant policies again and again focus on the need for joined up services and joined up delivery. Overall a greater policy basis for the review particularly focussing on the challenges and continuing obstacles (often emanating from a siloed approach on the state side) to delivering across policy and funding lines would be helpful. The Youth Service Grant supports Youth Services, this was the policy basis for its establishment. We believe the existence and health of Youth Services to deliver for young people across the policy agenda is a critical outcome of the Youth Service Grant.

Section 2: Deliverables

The identified potential deliverables are broken down into 3 categories (to facilitate flexible delivery options):

- **Core deliverables** – changes to the scheme necessary to meet the threshold for a successful reform of the YSGS
- **Core + deliverables** – changes flowing from the internal audit recommendations, but which have a longer development lead-in time than the core deliverables.
- **Value-added deliverables** – further changes to the scheme that would have a meaningful and positive impact

Topic 2.1: Core Deliverables

The current Reform Project Plan proposes the following as the essential deliverables of the project:

- Clarify the policy intent underpinning the YSGS
- Clarify criteria for organisations to qualify for YSGS funding.
- Ensure the grant scheme rules are in alignment with the updated criteria and policy intent.
- Enable a funding intermediary to establish Service Level Agreements with organisations
- Implement a (scalable governance framework for funded organisations

The Reform Project Plan outlines the requirements to put the YSGS on a sound administrative footing on which further improvement can be built. Please give your overall feedback on this key priority.

(500 Words Max)

Consistent with our comments above, we agree with clarifying the policy intent. However, it needs to be clear how this works. It should not be overly based on technocratic issues like auditing and administrative issues. These are important but need to serve the overall policy intent and we believe there is no shortage of audits, inspections, data collection and oversight. We are very much open to a productive conversation about issues like audits and data of course in the reform process, but it is important to get the policy focus and big picture right to best inform this.

The criteria for qualifying certainly needs to be clear. We believe the funding is for Youth Services and these are critical organisations in the delivery of services to local young people and communities in a joined-up fashion based on accepted Government policy. They are local and community-based delivering in a cross-cutting fashion which is a clear need.

Importantly then many of the criteria should be organisational. We have progressed this approach to our work for a number of years beginning with our own quality standards for Youth Services from 2003. While perhaps a little dated, we are happy to make these available. There have also been other key initiatives from the Department on quality assurance, and developments in other funding areas such as IYJS, TUSLA and UBU in our field. Beyond this there have been other developments in recent times in charity regulation, company law and accounting standards. These are the type of organisational criteria that could determine entry to the scheme, and we recommend a “Quality standards” type approach. The 1986 rules also set out organisational criteria which have utility particularly relating to the philosophy and values of the organisations.

Organisational coherence and organisational development must then be key indicators for the fund particularly as it has been used to support the core operations of organisations and in our view should continue to carry out this critical role.

We believe any funding intermediary needs very careful consideration. The UBU experience led to a lot of dislocation and a rather unproductive and time-consuming processes. It appears that a large amount of funding has gone into ETBs in oversight, staffing, governance and audit work in the UBU reform process rather than frontline services and issues still remain relating to micromanagement and lack of uniformity. We believe our role as an intermediary body for the grant provides tremendous added value and should be maintained. As a national organisation this role would help the Department provide coverage in new geographic areas.

As stated, any Governance framework should draw on the existing governance and compliance landscape which has been developed in the sector and follow a "Quality Standards" approach.

In our experience organisational aims that the YSG could support would be;

- a. Youth Centred.
- b. High level of quality.
- c. Are planned strategically.
- d. Are able to respond quickly.
- e. Are accessible to all young people.
- f. Services do not problematise young people.
- g. Volunteer led.

We also believe the UK presents evidence of problems in too rigid a split between targeted and universal work.

Topic 2.2: Core + Deliverables

The current Reform Project Plan considers the below as vital deliverables for the project, however they present a more complex challenge and will require a longer timeframe to develop.

- Implement a transparent entry/exit mechanism onto/off the scheme
- Evaluate and implement an agile and responsive grant funding model.
- Implement a performance evaluation framework
- Increase flexibility in the application process to allow for the fluctuating demands of the sector and individual organisations' needs.

The Reform Project Plan outlines the necessity for the scheme to provide the highest service level for children and young people in as equitable a manner possible. Please give your feedback on this aspect of the reform project.

(500 Words Max)

More information is needed here. The 1986 rules set out some still very relevant criteria for entry to the scheme. Again, it seems that technical and administrative considerations are to the fore. If the Department has some ideas about entry and exit from the scheme it would be helpful to set them out. We understood the YSG was being examined under a continuation of service commissioning model. The criteria set out in the previous question clearly set out the organisational requirements for qualifying for the scheme building on the substantial work done in various quarters on governance and accountability.

The concept of entry and exit from the scheme seems rather previous without a clear policy base. Once more clear organisational capacity and roots in local communities are critical considerations for good delivery for young people. We have seen new operators run into trouble because they have not possessed these qualities. Organisations need to be voluntary/volunteer led and meet the definition of youth work set out in the 2001 Act and clearly need to be not for profit. Much of this is covered in the 1986 document. There are a variety of organisations supported under the scheme that are not youth services or involved in youth work in any significant way. While these groups may be worthy of public funding, it is very much open to question whether this should be under the Youth Service Grant.

More clarity is needed on the "agile and responsive grant funding model". We are not convinced by the utility of stop start models, and constant changing of funded organisations can have a negative impact on young people. In terms of underserved areas, current providers are well placed to expand to these if supported with their experience, track record and organisational capacity. In fact, this has happened in recent times. If agile means being quick to respond we believe the last two years have amply demonstrated this.

While the target groups and outcomes may be different, we believe there has been a lot of work in the sector already on performance and evaluation frameworks. Once more, organisational development and health would need to be key indicators. There may be a place for different strands, somewhat like UBU, to facilitate flexibility.

We would like to see much more evidence about "fluctuating demands of the sector". This appears to be related to the rigid separation of targeted and universal work and the lack of attention to the need for Youth Services as a critical part of the infrastructure. Youth Services believe, and research shows, that there is unmet demand and the UBU process may have furthered this.

Topic 2.3: Value-Added Deliverables

The below deliverables are further changes to the scheme that would have a meaningful and positive impact, but are not essential to the reform project meeting its objectives.

- Establish a Quality framework
- Establish an equality/accessibility/integration framework
- A fit for purpose IT platform that will facilitate data collection and analysis

The Reform Project Plan aspires to make the YSGS as inclusive and accessible as possible. Please give your feedback regarding this priority.

(500 Words Max)

We are supportive of the idea of a Quality Framework and as already stated our organisation was the first to initiate this approach in the sector in Ireland in the 2,000's. We believe the outcomes in this regard should be focussed on organisational development and health and be based on the existing frameworks of audit, charity regulation, and existing oversight formats rather than reinventing the wheel.

We are supportive of any approach to promoting more equality in youth work. Youth Services have been working on this for several years and have been to the fore in working on LGBTI+ issues, teen parents, working with new communities, travellers, refugees and asylum seekers and several other diverse groups. Supporting organisations under the Youth Service Grant in this regard should be done in consultation with Youth Services already working extensively on these issues.

Funded organisations would be very supportive of "A fit for purpose IT platform that will facilitate data collection and analysis". There have been several promises and processes related to this, none of which has delivered. A useful draft counting tool for UBU does not seem to have progressed. The main utility of such a system similarly to a Quality Framework would be beneficial to integrating different funding lines and counting tools for proper policy integration.

We should not be reinventing the wheel and a Youth Service Grant properly based on policy priorities should integrate with other data collection methods such as UBU and IYJS and other funders of youth work. This would be a major efficiency to improve services to young people and transparency but also needs time and could be developed when the policy objectives and the issues surfaced in the audit process are progressed. It would be better to take the necessary time rather than make mistakes as was the case in the UBU process.

The principal challenge in this area is to reconcile an equality/accessibility/integration framework with the other objectives. Accessibility will be a challenge the more regulation and prescriptive oversight there is, and equal access takes time. A quality standards and organisational development focus would ease some of these challenges in our view.

Section 3: Project Delivery

Topic 3.1: Project Delivery Option

A two phase delivery model was recommended by the project team; with those deliverables deemed **Core and Core +** being scheduled for implementation by January 2024. This timeframe, it is envisioned, will facilitate meaningful reform whilst allowing the project team to fulfil its commitment to partake in consistent and meaningful engagement with the primary stakeholders of this project, throughout the life-cycle of the project

The remaining reforms, comprising the **Value-Added** deliverables, are expected to be finalised by July 2024 (in advance of the 2025 funding cycle).

The Reform Project team proposed a dual delivery model, considering this to be an ambitious but realistic timeframe. Please give your feedback regarding this priority.

(500 Words Max)

It is difficult to give a view on the timetable before the details of the changes proposed are known. The timing of the reform project is far less relevant than the depth and extensiveness of what might be proposed. The Youth Service Grant has acted as the backbone of youth service provision in Ireland for some time. It is possible an overly strenuous reform process will be highly challenging for some local services. Once more we feel it is the value attached to these local community-based not for profit providers that is paramount. Audit and technical issues can be dealt with, and youth services have built up considerable experience in these. Community infrastructure, particularly in remote areas, is far harder to replace.

All DCEDIY funding has effectively now been subject to review in recent times, and this can create uncertainty in terms of frontline services particularly for staff and volunteers and even young people. Changes to the Youth Service Grant could have substantial impact on frontline services but we cannot assess these in the absence of precise proposals.

Coupled with increased governance, audit and regulatory measures and funding cuts it has been difficult to plan and give certainty to frontline provision. This should be the guiding principles in any change. Naturally we welcome the commitment to ongoing consultation but the experience of the UBU process illustrates that more than this is needed. More bureaucracy, middle management, audits, inspections and staffing for state bodies is not what frontline services for young people need at this time.

An overarching issue in the entire reform process is the total financial envelope. Increased work has been based on the grant over time but with limited expansion in real terms and cutbacks in more recent times. The funding review by the Dept of Education in the 2,000's was to cover this but went nowhere. It could well be the case now that significant reform of the grant with a strict focus on "universal" work could inadvertently mean the discontinuation of some of the core infrastructure of youth provision locally and nationally entailing a major challenge for local community-based youth services.

Once more a hard division between targeted and universal may not always help. For example, an offending young person may benefit as much from the youth club as the young person coping with bereavement, or bullying, or relationship problems, these separations are not always so neat.

Section 4: Open Feedback

Topic 4.1: Open input

Please outline your overall response to the YSGS reform project plan.

(800 Words Max)

The 1986 rules set out some key objectives for the scheme and these should not be dismissed as they have served as a basis for the development of Youth Services. Important provisions include a strong focus on organisations and their development, a recognition of the role of the voluntary sector as deliverers, the diversity of the sector, definitions, concepts and values of youth organisations, and funding for core staff if they “enhance and expand the programme and services of a voluntary organisation in pursuit of its clearly stated objectives”.

Most critically it is important to recognise the key elements of infrastructure that local community-based Youth Services, supported by the Youth Service Grant, bring to the provision of services to children and young people. Youth Work Ireland has a federal model and observes that this has considerable advantages particularly in terms of flexibility and responding to local need. It also ensures local services are led by local people, all governed by an SLA. Flexibility in the Youth Service Grant can support these strengths which are so critical to delivering on Government policy, as evidenced in the Covid crisis.

Governance and Compliance

Each Youth Work Ireland member has its own voluntary board and makes decisions on the running of the company and local services subject to agreement with funders and relevant Service Level Agreements. Compliance and governance arrangements are also supported by the Youth Service Grant. This is an ever-increasing workload with the growing emphasis on governance and compliance by all funders and bearing in mind that members are funded quite diversely to deliver on the Integrated Youth Services Model. A properly functioning board is the key to the delivery of quality services for young people and this work is also supported by the Youth Service Grant. All local projects and work with young people need this support and would still be required in the absence of Youth Services.

Support to Projects

A core assumption of the Integrated Youth Service Model is that the various projects supporting young people locally are not free-floating entities. They operate in a community and with the support of a regional youth service. Thus, a key function of the Youth Service Grant is offering numerous supports to projects. This can be the premises, training for youth workers, vetting of volunteers, international exchanges, reflective practice through management and national engagement and several more areas. In the case of the Covid crisis this meant a rapid response was possible and new structures did not need to be put in place.

Local Delivery and Integration with Local Services

The Integrated Youth Service Model optimises integration with other services locally in a “joined up” manner, an area in which the state often struggles. This covers all major state services such as schools, TUSLA (including its Education Support Service), HSE, NEPs, School Completion, DSP and many more. Some of this work is informal. A large proportion is preventive in nature, but youth services often have to assist in more serious interventions. Youth services and youth workers can be utilised as vital resources in case conferences and other decision making. Thus, the regional youth service is seen as a

resource by other state services dealing with young people and this is supported by the Youth Service Grant. Local services also play a crucial role in the local state response through CYPSC's, The Child and Family Support networks, local development actors, and local authorities to name just a few. Local Youth Services are often called upon to assist these bodies. This is an important strategic issue for the DCEDIY and its relevant policies and in achieving joined up local services.

Local youth services are close to local decision making and local communities, they know the school principals, the social work teams, community groups and other relevant actors. They can leverage other funds and ensure a joined-up service not a siloed one. This is valuable infrastructure that the Government has an interest in promoting.

Facilities

Young people tell us again and again that they appreciate proper facilities for the delivery of youth work. Young people face a competitive world of leisure and media today and voluntary services need to match this. Unfortunately, the state still offers no dedicated capital support for youth facilities despite this being identified in various reports down through the years. The alternative to some capital provision is annual allocations paying for rent and premises which is a poor use of public resources. The provision of such facilities by the voluntary sector represents extremely good value for money for the state. Many Youth Work Ireland members have ensured that their services are delivered in quality accessible locations with modern up to date equipment.

Many of these have been brought into public use by youth services down the years and represent an important element of the public infrastructure for youth work. This element of the service entails a significant commitment to facilities and their management including staffing, volunteers, health and safety policies and procedures, HACCP policies, sub-leases with tenants, planning and associated matters. This is a valuable outcome from work supported by the Youth Service Grant.

Safeguarding

Naturally all youth services adhere to the highest standards of child protection and safeguarding. The Youth Service acts as a key conduit for designated liaison people for all projects, clubs and activities. It is also the central resource for Garda Vetting locally and the training of staff. The oversight of ratios and best practice in child protection in service delivery is a key function of the Youth Service and is supported by the Youth Service Grant. These are all mission critical activities that any organisation must deliver on. However, they still need people, premises, resources and staff to ensure they happen to the highest standards, and we are not convinced a management fee approach properly supports this critical work.

Volunteering

At last count, there are over 6,000 volunteers in Youth Work Ireland. These range across club volunteers, volunteers for targeted work and those involved in governance. The systems of management, training, support, oversight, recruitment, vetting and deployment are all supported by the Youth Service Grant. Volunteers are central to the concept of a voluntary led organisation. Often it is those who have been involved in the delivery of a service who go on to take up prominent roles in terms of leadership and governance. The majority of these volunteers support our youth clubs so are doing front line work with young people often in isolated communities and with limited or no resources. Centralised administration support is often needed for basic club functions such as insurance, vetting, recruitment, publicity, fundraising etc. This is again supported from the Youth Service Grant.

The role of volunteers and volunteering seems to be absent in the review. If universal services are the main concern of the process this has to be part of it as it is still a central aspect of the delivery of more universal youth work. These were quite central to the 1986 Rules.

National Services

A vast range of services are also provided nationally through collective actions and the work of Youth Work Ireland nationally. The collective reflection and peer review by members leads to better standards of governance and service delivery. National programmes present an ideal service delivery role along with a range of trainings and practice support. Youth participation and hearing young voices through our National Youth Action Group is also an important support along with a greater focus on assistance and direct work on fundraising. We run a highly innovative set of universal national programmes such as the Irish Youth Music Awards, Youthwave and support new innovative initiatives such as employment programmes, detached work, online safety and innovation relating to Youth Information, LGBTI+ work, work with travellers, our compliance function based on our SLA, networking staff, volunteers, and young people in our consensus process and conference.

We also engage in several EU networks which significantly enhance our support to members in delivering on the ground and ensure we are well focussed on new developments there. Nationally we support the development of the youth sector by engaging with the National Youth Council, the Wheel, the Children's Rights Alliance, NSETS, north south work and work with youth organisations in the British Isles. We also support the work of a variety of Government Departments and agencies as requested naturally including the DCEDIY. Increasingly compliance and good governance support are more and more important in the national supports offered along with shared services such as vetting, compliance, safeguarding training, insurance and I.T.

The Youth Service Grant supports universal youth work but also the infrastructure of organisation that makes all this and many other initiatives possible. We see this as the Integrated Youth Service Model. Funders must look beyond the silos of projects on their own and think about a joined-up service which serves the exact policy needs they have set out in their own documents.

The hugely important (though not glamorous) support, management and oversight that is rightly demanded of voluntary youth services cannot be created out of thin air. It is our view that this critical piece of infrastructure is what the Youth Service Grant supports, and it offers good value for money.

Topic 4.2: Stakeholder Engagement

The project team considers feedback from all the YSGS's stakeholders as integral to the success of the project. Future engagement options are still being explored.

Please give your feedback on what form you would like to see future engagement take.

(500 Words Max)

We are happy to take part in any future engagement. Questionnaires have their limitations. Engagement with national youth organisations is crucial. We can facilitate this directly and collectively with our 20 members who play a key role ensuring local services led by local people engaging directly in communities. There are several face-to-face options for this such as our AGM or a Convention of members which we can facilitate.

As a federal organisation we believe local opinions and the considerable experience of our members in delivering in this field and utilising funding should be understood. We need to avoid throwing out the baby with the bathwater and reinventing the wheel in any review. There is huge value in the work done to date and local relationships developed in communities with young people and their families and a range of other services.

To assist the process we are also attaching;

The 1986 Rules of the Scheme

The previous National Youth Work Development Plan

Our Integrated Youth Service Model

An Impact Assessment of the Integrated Youth Service Model

Data Protection

The DCEDIY fully respects your right to privacy. Any personal information which you volunteer to the DCEDIY will be treated with the highest standards of security and confidentiality, strictly in accordance with the Data Protection Acts. If you require further information related to data protection please visit:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/data-protection/>

Thank you for your submission.